

Hard Hats DO Save Lives



BM1(SW) Michael Fournier (above) holds the hard hat he was wearing during an underway replenishment, and the rubber shot-line projectile that hit his helmet. A close-up photo of the helmet shows the damage where the projectile struck the helmet. One can only speculate about how seriously Petty Officer Fournier might have been injured had he not been wearing his hard hat.



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Last January, USS *George Philip* (FFG 12) conducted her last underway refueling before the ship's scheduled decommissioning. As usual, the ship used operational risk management, held a safety brief, and followed safety standards.

As he had done numerous times in the past, BM1(SW) Michael Fournier donned his hard hat and strapped his chinstrap. He had no idea these simple precautions could save his life during this refueling.

All hands topside took protective cover while anticipating the first shot line, but, for some unknown reason, it was delayed. Everyone stayed behind cover as they finally heard the first shot. Oddly, the shot sounded like it came from forward of the ship. Petty Officer Fournier curiously raised his head from behind a large gray ventilation duct to assess the situation. As he did, he saw the line-throwing gun's rubber projectile coming right at him—with no time to duck. The projectile hit the side of his hard hat with such force that he was stunned. His first inclination was to sit calmly and take in his surroundings. When he removed his hard hat, he noticed it was cracked in two places; the elastic head strap inside the helmet was also in pieces.

Shipmates rushed to make sure he was OK, and after the corpsman determined BM1 Fournier wasn't injured, he got up, grabbed another hard hat, and returned to his unrep station.

This story could have ended tragically. A potential Class "A" mishap was averted because proper personal protective equipment was worn. Those who consider hard hats to be nuisances and uncomfortable or stupid should think again. Had BM1 Fournier not been wearing his hard hat, he probably would have been seriously injured or killed, since the rubber projectile hit his hard-hat just above his right temple.

In this case, a seasoned boatswain's mate practiced routine safety right to the very end.

What's the moral of this story? Even when you're nearing the home stretch, never let down your guard. 🛡️